

Appleby Archaeology Group

At the December meeting Appleby Archaeology Group enjoyed an enthusiastic introduction to Landscape History from Richard Hazelhurst of Temple Sowerby.

Mr Hazelhurst began by showing a number of photographs of the local landscape to illustrate its variety and to emphasise that the Cumbrian landscape is not just that of the picture postcard image of the Lakes. He spoke of the changes that are occurring all the time and how the landscape grows and develops with the activities of man and nature. He explained that landscape history is about looking around at all the evidence to build up a picture of how the past has affected what we see to-day.

He continued by giving an overview of some of the many factors and features that help us to understand the history. The geological record is the starting point as this gives an insight into potential land use for example the deposition of minerals led to mining, the rich valleys provided good agricultural land. Looking at the ecology of the countryside gives clues to its past, the distribution of bracken may indicate grazing patterns, and the scarcity of ancient woodland suggests clearance.

He then talked of some of the features that have changed the landscape over the centuries. Evidence of industry in the stone age is seen in the production of polished axes from Langdale. The stone axes which were polished by grinding with St Bees sandstone are found in different parts of the country. In order for the people to work on the high fells they must have cleared woodland for fire and shelter thus altering the landscape.

The Romans by their building of fortifications, roads and the wall added features which have now become part of our landscape. After the Romans left the country was subject to a number of invasions, all left their mark. The Irish Celtic and Anglian influence is seen in very early Christian settlements and in the remains of crosses those at Irton and Bewcastle being examples. The distribution of place names gives a clue to the Viking settlements. Many names, such as Melmerby, in the east and north are Danish in origin, the invaders coming from the east. In the west and south many names are Norse, for example Grayrigg, the invaders reaching Cumbria from Ireland the west of Scotland and the Isle of Man. Clearance of woodland continued throughout to provide agricultural land. Names can indicate the use the land was put to an example is Grizedale, a valley where pigs were kept.

The last invasion was that of the Normans and they made dramatic changes in the landscape with their large estates and religious foundations. Their buildings most

notably churches and castles remain prominent features of the landscape today. Other features which provide clues to the history of the county were mentioned. These included the lay-out of towns and villages; the types of field boundaries; the distribution of lime kilns; the style of the farm buildings and houses many of which were built and developed at times of relative peace and prosperity in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. More modern changes in the Cumbrian landscape are often the result of industrial changes examples cited were iron mining, the nuclear industry, the development of transport systems from canals to the Motorway. They all create new landscape features.

In conclusion Mr Hazelhurst emphasised that everything we see is part of the landscape and that the landscape historian must view an area in its entirety to begin to understand the changes that have taken place over the centuries.

P.H.Rouston 8/12/2000

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